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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, A/S FRAZER, SE WILLIAMSON, AF/C  
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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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SUBJECT: DARFUR REBEL MOVEMENTS HINT AT COOPERATION WHILE MINNAWI  
ENJOYS DARFUR'S RAINY SEASON

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1067  
B) KHARTOUM 992

1. (SBU) Summary: Confidants of Minni Minawi report he has no immediate plans to return soon from Darfur. Meanwhile political representatives of JEM, SLA/MM, SLA/U and SLA/AW all hint at a new, grass-roots political initiative among Darfur rebel groups. JEM reports cooperation with SLA/AW, SLA/Unity appears delighted by their reception with JEM in Geneva last week, and Abdulwahid's brother-in-law intends to push Darfur rebel representatives and civil society leaders towards an agreement in Arusha, Tanzania at the end of the month. While all this may come to nothing, the advent of the rainy season in Darfur is also lowering the odds that Zaghawa factions will unite in a "Zaghawa tsunami" to attack Khartoum following on the recent ICC indictment of President Bashir. End summary.

2. (SBU) After weeks in Darfur, Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signatory Minni Minnawi is showing no signs of returning to Khartoum and reengaging with the Government of National Unity (GNU). Abdelaziz Sam, legal secretary for the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority and close friend of Minnawi, told Poloff on July 17, "Minni has no reason to come back to Khartoum. He has things to do in the field. He is sending a message that the GNU needs to fill gaps in humanitarian security." Mohammed Bashir, Minnawi's chief of staff in Khartoum, confirmed that Minnawi will remain in Darfur: "He is unhappy with the implementation of the DPA, which is not going well. He won't stay in Khartoum without developments in implementation. He has no intention to come back." Within Khartoum, Minnawi's absence is causing his movement to churn with discord, as a small group of TDRA officials unsuccessfully approached Government of Sudan (GOS) official Nafie Ali Nafie to propose a so-called "white coup" that would have the SLM/MM Health Minister in South Darfur replace Minni Minawi as Senior Presidential Assistant (septel). Local press reported that Minnawi reassured President Bashir via phone that he intends to return to Khartoum to resume his duties, but his advisors said they cannot confirm this phone call.

3. (SBU) While Sam denied that SLA/MM is conferring with DPA non-signatories on a Darfur political or security agreement, Bashir said the movement is in "close dialogue" with non-signatories, currently holding meetings in the field and in Khartoum to further nascent peace-making efforts. Bashir declined to comment on which groups are meeting, but added that Minnawi would likely return from Darfur to Khartoum after a "narrow circle of insiders" reach a conclusion on how to advance the political process. Although Minnawi has not been reachable by phone for several days, his commanders have confirmed he is ready to meet CDA Fernandez on Thursday, July 24 in Umm Barro, North Darfur. Minnawi jokingly told Fernandez by phone on July 20 that "your visit will determine whether or not I return, especially if the regime blocks you again from visiting me."

4. (SBU) Following last week's meetings in Geneva between representatives of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and SLA/Unity (ref. A), political leaders within JEM were optimistic about the prospects for peace talks. Gibreil Fideil, Khalil

Ibrahim's brother, told Poloff from his home in London, "We are working on a roadmap to peace, and we are ready to move to the next stage. We expect contact with the new mediator (Bassole) very soon." When asked about rumors that JEM field commanders are planning an imminent march on Khartoum or other locations outside Darfur, Fideil denied these reports. "If there is room for a peaceful solution, then we are ready - we are open to negotiations and that's our priority." Fideil strongly denied that JEM took part in the July 8 attacks on UNAMID, noting that JEM's leadership had condemned the attack, and suggested that breakaway commanders from SLA/Unity had masterminded the attacks which killed 7 UNAMID peacekeepers. Omer Abdulhamid, JEM's political representative in El Fasher, echoed Fideil's regard for increased cooperation among JEM and other rebel groups, as seen in Geneva, and reported that JEM has begun working together with political representatives from SLA/Abdulwahid, with the goal of forming one unit in any upcoming negotiations.

15. (SBU) Speaking with Poloff at the embassy July 17, Abdelgasim Seifeldin, brother-in-law of the rebel-in-exile Abdulwahid, told Poloff that a broad swath of Darfuris are preparing a list of demands as a precondition for talks with the government. He said representatives from civil society organizations and some armed rebel movements intend to finalize their plans at a meeting in Arusha, Tanzania July 28-29. (Note: It appears that the Arusha meeting is being organized by Tijane Sesse, a well-regarded former governor of Darfur. The meeting does not appear to be sponsored by any particular NGO nor is it sponsored by the UN, but rather is an informal meeting of Darfurian intellectuals/civil society and apparently some representatives of SLA/AW as well. End note.) Politically aligned with the SPLM but an active voice for his fellow Darfuris, Seifeldin sees Darfuris themselves as the only ones capable of uniting the various factions, leaders and movements. Citing a Sudanese expression, he told Poloff, "Only a turtle knows

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where to bite another turtle." After recounting his previous trips to the United States, Seifeldin noted that financial assistance would be necessary should the international community be interested in supporting a political conference before the end of the year.

16. (SBU) Spokesman of SLA/Unity Mahgoub Hussein called Poloff from his London home several times this past week to express his delight following the Geneva meetings. "SLA/Unity has good cooperation with international organizations, and with the Justice and Equality Movement," and later added, "We would like for representatives from SLA/Unity to travel to America just like Minni Minnawi." After denying that commanders from SLA/Unity perpetrated the UNAMID attack, Hussein informed Poloff of rumors in the Sudanese diaspora that ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo intends to charge two SLA/Unity commanders with war crimes, specifically for the October 2007 Haskanita attack against Nigerian peacekeepers. "If (SLA commander Abubakr) Kado and another commander are charged by the ICC, and if the ICC issues the warrants, SLA/Unity will cut them from the movement and surrender them to the ICC," claimed Hussein.

17. (SBU) JEM's military spokesman released a statement accusing Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) of bombing an isolated village near Jebel Moon, in West Darfur, on Friday, July 18, killing two, but UNAMID sources were unable to confirm the bombing. The El Fasher office of the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) was only able to confirm that one SAF improvised bomber (an Antonov or C-130) and two SAF Mig fighter aircraft had bombed an uninhabited area near the village of Tarantara, in South Darfur near the junctions of the three states, on Thursday, July 17. Frazer King of UNDSS surmised that this may have been a dry run for a larger operation, but had not received word of any subsequent SAF aerial bombardment.

18. (SBU) Comment: Minnawi's extended stay in Darfur has made Khartoum very nervous, but the arrival of the rainy season and signs that there is not (yet) an overt cooperation agreement between JEM, SLA/U, and SLA/MM should reassure Khartoum that a repeat performance of the JEM attack on Khartoum is not likely at the moment. We don't discount the possibility of a JEM attack on sites in Darfur or Kordofan, however. It is interesting to note that there is significant positioning occurring among the rebel movements and even with civil society groups in advance of engagement in earnest by the Chief Mediator. Post will report additional information about the proposed meeting in Arusha when it becomes available.

